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ABSTRACT

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a 2-year program beginning with 8 weeks of multiple family meetings and transitioning into a long-term follow-up segment called FASTWORKS. FAST uses tested family therapy principles, delinquency and substance-abuse strategies, psychiatric techniques, family systems theory, and group dynamics to give parents and children an opportunity to spend time together as they participate in the community. Most communities identify children who exhibit multiple risk factors, but parents can refer themselves to FAST. FAST uses a nonexperimental pretest-posttest evaluation design that focuses on initial outcomes and protective factors developed during the eight weekly sessions. Collaborative teams in Canada gathered evaluation data for 27 FAST programs from 15 elementary schools. The families of at least 212 children graduated from the program. Aggregate evaluation results indicate that these 27 FAST program cycles successfully achieved the immediate outcomes associated with the program. Parents and teachers reported statistically significant decreases in the child behavior problems, and families reported increased cohesion and maintained adaptability scores in the normal range. Qualitative responses on the program evaluation forms completed by family members indicated that program experiences were consistent with program goals. (SLD)

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ED 435 689

FAST
Families and Schools Together

CANADA

Comprehensive Evaluation Report for the Canadian Replication of the *Families and Schools Together* (*FAST*) Program

Report accompanying poster presentation to the Human Services Evaluation topical interest group at the annual conference of the American Evaluation Association, Orlando.

James S. Sass
Alliance for Children and Families
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
November, 1999

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Comprehensive Evaluation Report for the Canadian Replication of the *Families and Schools Together* (*FAST*) Program
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FOREWORD

Family Service Canada (FSC) is a national, voluntary charitable organization dedicated to improving the well-being of families in Canada. Its vision is: "Strong families in a caring society/Des families unies dans une societe la solidarite." Family Service Canada is supported by a membership of concerned individuals and a network of over 100 local family-serving agencies, located across Canada.

One of its primary functions is to promote innovative, quality program models which are preventative, supportive to families, and which contribute to community building and citizen engagement. The Families and Schools Together (FAST) program is an effective program developed in the United States in 1988 and begun in Canada in Calgary in 1996. FSC, working in partnership with the Alliance for Children and Families has initiated a national support program to facilitate the implementation of FAST in communities across Canada. FSC, with Catholic Family Service in Calgary, is coordinating the Training and Evaluation components of the program and assisting agencies to implement the program in their local communities. In addition, FSC is engaged in producing the FAST program materials in French and in finding suitable evaluation measures in French.

Evaluation of effectiveness and outcomes for children and families is an integral component of FAST. The report identifies the goals of the program for improved family health and well-being, the measures used to evaluate indicators of individual and family functioning, and the results of these evaluations. The report demonstrates the effectiveness of this program in Canada and provides convincing evidence for ongoing funding in additional communities.

The partnership for FAST between the Alliance for Children and Families and Family Service Canada will provide ongoing opportunities for evaluation and continuous improvement of the overall program, its components, the evaluation tools, and training and networking activities.

Margaret Fietz
Chief Executive Officer
Family Service Canada

THE FAST PROGRAM

Components of FAST

FAST is a two-year program beginning with eight weeks of multiple family meetings and transitioning into a long-term follow-up segment called FASTWORKS. FAST gives parents and their children an opportunity to spend quality time together, enjoy one another, and participate more fully and comfortably in their local community. The intention is to help children succeed.

Though simple in focus, the program's structure embodies a unique and complex interplay of tested family therapy principles, delinquency and substance-abuse prevention strategies, psychiatric techniques, family systems theory, and group dynamics. The FAST curriculum is designed to allow everyone, regardless of age, to have fun while systematically enhancing parent-child interactions, empowering parents, and building parent support.

FAST Beginnings

Parents can self-refer, however, in most communities teachers identify children who exhibit multiple risk factors that put them at risk for future academic and social problems. The selection process may include other school professionals. The school initially contacts the parents, explains the situation, and seeks their permission to receive more information about FAST.

Trained, sensitive recruiters — parent partners and another FAST team member — visit parents at home to invite them to participate in FAST. Parents learn what to expect in FAST and begin building relationships with FAST team members.

Weekly Meetings

Families gather with eight to 12 other families weekly for eight sessions at the child's school. Meetings follow a uniform agenda that includes carefully planned opening and closing traditions, a family meal, structured family activities, parent mutual-support time, kids' time, and parent-child one-to-one time with the selected child. Meetings are led by a trained team that includes a graduate FAST parent, a school professional (e.g., school social worker), and two community-based partners (one with expertise in mental health and one with expertise in substance abuse). The activities are lively and fun and intended to build family unity. They include eating a meal together, creating a family flag, singing, and participating in lively exercises in communication and feelings identification, among other activities.

The parent-child one-to-one time, called Special Play, is at the core of the FAST program. In 15 minutes of uninterrupted quality time, parents play one-on-one with their child in ways that build the child's self-esteem and enhance parent-child communication. Most children and parents enjoy this special time together. Parents continue Special Play at home between FAST sessions and during the next two years for 15 minutes daily.

The multifamily sessions include time for the children to play together to develop positive peer relationships while parents discuss their common interests and concerns, such as parenting issues and life stresses. During this time, parents build an informal support network for themselves to help one another discover solutions for parenting and family concerns.

To promote attendance, FAST offers intangible incentives such as respect and social support as well as tangible ones such as transportation, a hot meal, and child care for infants and toddlers. Each family wins a gift package of family-specific gifts sometime during the eight-week program. The winning family then reciprocates by preparing and hosting the hot meal for the following session. Cash is given to the family to purchase food.

Graduation and FASTWORKS

A graduation ceremony is held. Invitations are sent, certificates are presented by the school principal, and the successes of the individual families are celebrated. Families pride themselves on being "FAST graduates."

Following graduation, families participate in FASTWORKS, a series of monthly family-support meetings designed to maintain the active social network. FASTWORKS is run by a parent advisory council of graduates, with gradually decreasing staff assistance.

After several FAST cycles in one school, FASTWORKS becomes an ongoing monthly, multifamily meeting in which the agenda is set by participating parents. Active leaders, the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), get a budget for planning events in which up to 40 FAST families gather in the school, in a community setting,-or on an outing of some kind. The eight-week FAST cycles are gradually perceived as a bridge for moving new families into the FASTWORKS program. The initial FAST experience builds interdependence among participants, thus increasing the likelihood that they will remain in the FASTWORKS program. It becomes a local association of parents with common experiences. Families that in the past were isolated and never attended school for any positive purpose become actively involved in school activities. The FAST social network serves as support, and FASTWORKS functions as a safety net to encourage parents to take more risks.

EVALUATION DESIGN

FAST uses a nonexperimental, pretest-posttest evaluation design that focuses on initial outcomes and protective factors developed during the eight weekly sessions (Billingham, 1993; McDonald & Billingham, 1992). FAST is an early intervention/prevention program that engages children before they show problems with school failure, violence, delinquency, or substance abuse. Thus, FAST cannot directly measure these problems. Instead, FAST measures factors that are highly correlated with the onset of these problems in adolescence and adulthood. That is to say, these child and family factors are predictors of school failure, violence, delinquency, substance abuse, etc.

The factors assessed by FAST are child behavior, family functioning, parent-school involvement, and families' experiences of the program and its impact. Families complete a series of questionnaires before the program begins. After the eight weeks, they complete these questionnaires once again, and an additional set of questionnaires. Teachers complete the child behavior questionnaire before and after the program.

Evaluation Instruments

Child Behavior

The Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (RBPC; Quay & Peterson, 1987) is a widely respected tool for assessing children's behavior problems. The RBPC manual provides normative data for both boys and girls, and for normal and clinical samples. These data allow FAST to compare the behavioral characteristics of FAST children with children in the larger population.

FAST uses parent and teacher reports of total behavior problems and four of the RBPC's six subscales. The conduct disorder subscale measures non-empathic aggression and is correlated with juvenile offenses. The attention problems and motor excess subscales exhibit a negative relationship with academic achievement. The anxiety/withdrawal subscale assesses the inverse of self-esteem and has a positive correlation with substance abuse. (Because elementary school children usually have very low scores on the two remaining subscales — socialized aggression and psychotic behavior — FAST does not analyze these factors in evaluation reports.)

Family Functioning
Families complete two scales that assess social characteristics of healthy families. The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (FACES III; Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985) addresses two central factors in family functioning: adaptability (the ability to change) and cohesion (the degree to which family members are connected). Research has shown that these factors predict competence in school, resilience, and the quality of the parent-child relationship (including child neglect and abuse).

The isolation subscale of the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1995) measures a parent's sense of social isolation and social support. Social isolation and insufficient social support can exacerbate a parent's experience of stress and influence child behavior.

Parent-School Involvement
The Witte Parent Survey (Witte, 1991) is FAST's measure of parent-school involvement. Selected questions — answered by parents — address four areas: number of times the parents have contacted the school, number of times the school has contacted the parents, parental involvement in school organizations, and parental participation in school-related activities with their child. Positive parent-school involvement can promote the child's academic success and empower parents as prevention agents in their children's lives.

Participants' Program Experiences
The Program Evaluation by Family (McDonald, 1995) is an open-ended questionnaire that provides families with an opportunity to express their experiences in the program and the program's effect in their lives. The families also rate the program on a one-to-10 scale.

SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

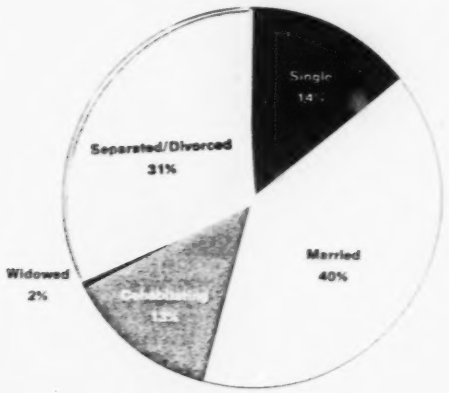
Cycle and Site Information

Collaborative teams in Canada gathered evaluation data for 27 FAST program cycles between winter 1996 and spring 1998. The sites for these program cycles were 15 elementary schools in three provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario).[1] The schools had an average enrollment of 417 students. At the schools that reported data on student ethnicity, 65 percent of the students were White, 15 percent were Asian, 9 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Black, 3 percent were Aboriginal, and 5 percent were of another ethnic background.

Family Information

Home Life
The families of at least 212 children graduated from the program.[2] Fourteen percent were single-parent households, 41 percent were married, 31 percent were separated or divorced, 2 percent were widowed, and in 13 percent of the households, the adults were living together, unmarried

FIGURE 1:
Marital Status

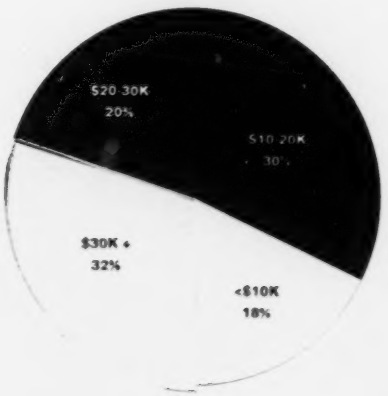


(Figure 1).[3] The average number of children in the home was 2.4. The average age of the mothers was 33 years. Sixty-seven percent of the mothers had at least graduated from high school or the equivalent, including 46 percent with some technical school or college experience. Fifty-nine percent of the fathers had at least graduated from high school or the equivalent, including 25 percent with some technical school or college experience.

Economic Data

Thirty-seven percent of the mothers worked full-time, 23 percent worked part-time, 15 percent were looking for work, 21 percent were not employed outside the home, and four percent were disabled. Eighty-six percent of the fathers worked full-time, 3 percent worked part-time, 6 percent were looking for work, and 6 percent were disabled. Eighteen percent of the families reported yearly income of less than $10,000 (or did not report their income), 30 percent reported income of $10-20,000 per year, 20 percent reported income of $20-30,000, and 32 percent reported yearly income of $30,000 or more (Figure 2). Nineteen percent of the families reported receiving some form of public assistance.

FIGURE 2:
Income



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Family Profile

The families largely reported pretest scores in the normal ranges for family functioning, as assessed by the FACES III (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985). Upon entering the program, 70 percent of the families had scores in the normal range on cohesion, 62 percent had normal scores on adaptability, and 45 percent had normal scores on both scales. Most notable among the scores that fell outside of the normal range were the 23 percent who had lower than normal scores in cohesion and the 22 percent who had higher than normal scores in adaptability.

The families exhibited mixed characteristics on indicators of social isolation. On the isolation subscale of the Parenting Stress Index, the parents reported an average pre-program score at the 75th percentile, near the upper-limit of the normal range (Abidin, 1995). Thus, the average FAST family reported experiencing more social isolation than did the majority of the normal population. Thirty percent of the families reported isolation pretest scores above the normal range (greater social isolation than normal), 66 percent had scores within the normal range, and only 4 percent had scores below normal. Despite the high scores for social isolation, 96 percent percent of the families had a phone and 73 percent owned a car or truck. These contrasting results may indicate that the families had the economic resources not to be isolated, but experienced parenting stress related to an inadequate support system.

Child Information

At least 212 children graduated from the program. Sixty-eight percent were boys and 32 percent were girls. The average age of these children was 7.6 years. Nine percent of the children were in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten, 24 percent were in first grade, 20 percent were in second, 27 percent were in third, 12 percent were in fourth, 5 percent were in fifth, and 2 percent were in sixth grade. As indicated by mother's reported ethnicity, 74 percent of the children were White, 8 percent were Aboriginal, 8 percent were Asian, 4 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Black, and 4 percent were of another ethnic background.

FIGURE 3:
Revised Behavior Problem
Checklist Pretest Profile of Parent Reports
of Child Behavior Problems

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Child Behavior Profile

The FAST program is designed to reach children who have total behavior problem scores above the mean for the normal population but below the mean for the clinical population. Based on parent reports, the majority of the graduating children (57 percent) entered the program with scores fitting this FAST profile (Figure 3). Ten percent had scores below the normal mean and 33 percent of the children had scores above the clinical mean.[4]

Child characteristics are also reflected in behavior problem subscale scores. Comparisons to the mean scores for normal and clinical children indicate that on average the FAST boys and girls approached the clinical mean for most subscales (Figures 4 and 5). Both the boys and the girls had average pretests above the clinical population's mean score for anxiety/withdrawal.

FIGURE 4:
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist
Parent Pretest Reports for BOYS, with Comparisons to Clinical and Normal Populations (6-12 Years)

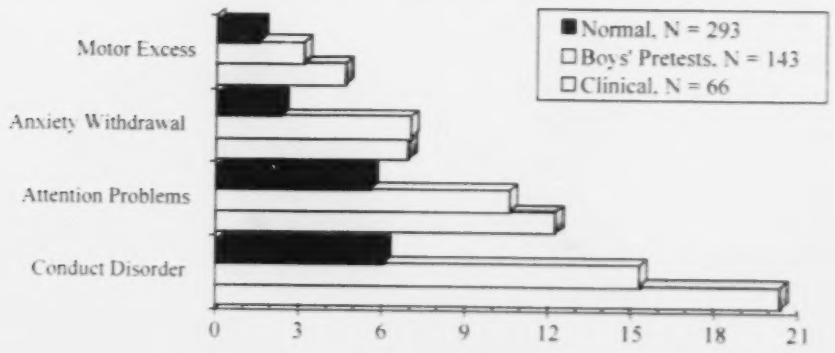
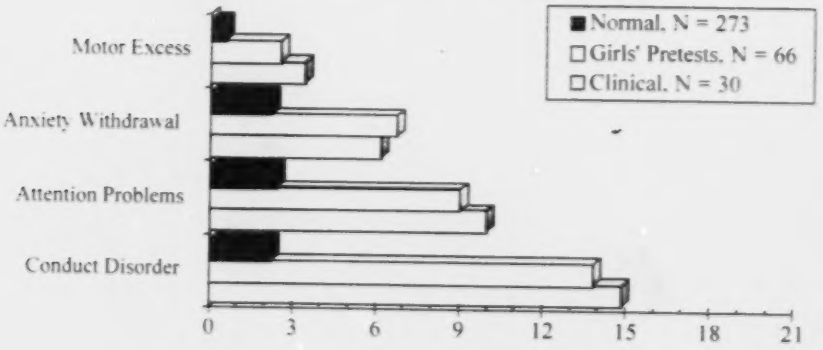


FIGURE 5:
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist
Parent Pretest Reports for GIRLS, with Comparisons to Clinical and Normal Populations (6-12 Years)



EVALUATION RESULTS

Evaluation results will be presented in three sections: "In the Home," "In the School," and "In the Community." Results related to the home will include outcomes in child behavior, family functioning, and the parent-child relationship. Results related to the school will include outcomes in classroom behavior, parent-school contact, and the parent-staff relationship. Results related to the community will include information on program participation and attendance, participant satisfaction, and the use of community resources.

In the Home

Child Behavior

The average parent posttest scores on the RBPC showed a statistically significant 24 percent decrease in the total behavior problem score (Table 1). The parents also reported statistically significant decreases on the four relevant subscales: a 25 percent decrease in the conduct disorder score, a 22 percent decrease in the attention problems score, a 22 percent decrease in the anxiety/withdrawal score, and a 26 percent decrease in the motor excess score (Figure 6).

Of the 199 parents who provided child behavior data, 143 (72 percent) reported a decrease in their child's total behavior problem score and nine (5 percent) reported no change. Seventy-two percent reported decreases in the conduct disorder score; 62 percent reported decreases in the attention problems score; 60 percent reported decreases in the anxiety/withdrawal score; and 52 percent reported decreases in the motor excess score. About 31 percent (62) of the children were reported to show post-program decreases on each of the four relevant subscales.

TABLE 1:
PARENT Average Scores on the
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1986)
N = 199

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
TOTAL SCORE:	39.52	23.47	29.91***	20.74
Subscales:				
Conduct Disorder:	15.19	10.13	11.44***	8.66
Attention Problems:	10.23	6.63	7.97***	6.38
Anxiety/Withdrawal:	6.95	4.54	5.41***	4.28
Motor Excess:	3.02	2.48	2.22***	1.96

*** Paired t-tests: statistically significant at $p \leq .001$

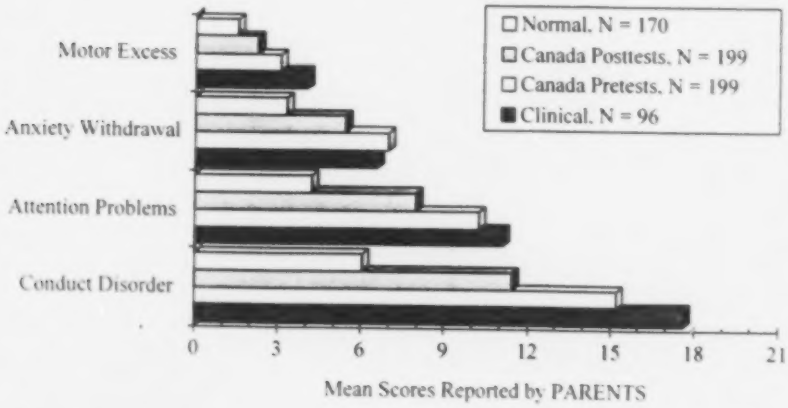
Family Functioning

Their average post-program scores showed a statistically significant 3 percent increase — within the normal range — in the cohesion scale score and virtually no change in the family adaptability score (Table 2). Sixty-eight percent of the families had posttest cohesion scores in the normal range and 59 percent of the families had posttest adaptability scores in the normal range.

The parent pre- and post-program results on the isolation subscale of the Parenting Stress Index indicated a very small decrease in the parents' average rating of their feelings of parenting stress

and isolation (Table 3). Forty-one percent (69 parents) reported a pre- to posttest decrease in their scores and 21 percent (36 parents) reported no change. Although the program graduates as a whole reported little change in social isolation, the average scores for the program graduates whose pre-program scores were at or above the FAST Canada average score (15) did show a decrease. These families showed a statistically significant 6 percent decrease in their feelings of parenting stress due to social isolation (Table 4).

FIGURE 6:
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist
PARENT Results for Children, with Comparisons
to the Clinical and Normal Populations (6-12 Years)



Parent-Child Relationship

Parents' responses to the Program Evaluation by Family reflect improvements in the relationship with their child. Statements below represent responses to two questions: "How has FAST affected your relationship with Your Child?" "How has FAST or its staff helped you?"

- "We have more respect for each other's wants and feelings. It brought us closer together."
- "I think we both understand each other better, him as a child and me as the adult."
- "I no longer feel that I am losing control of him."
- "The FAST program has helped me become closer to my child."
- "FAST showed me ways to have a better relationship with my child."

TABLE 2:
Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III)
N = 194

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Cohesion:	38.17	5.31	39.35**	5.27
Adaptability:	24.49	5.07	24.61	5.40

** Paired t-test: statistically significant at $p \leq .01$
Normal ranges: ADAPTABILITY 20 - 28 COHESION 35 - 44

TABLE 3:
Isolation Subscale of the Parenting Stress Index
All Graduates with Complete Data
N = 169

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Isolation:	15.00	3.48	14.90	3.72

Paired t-test: $p > .05$
Normal range (20th-80th, 50th percentile) 10 - 16, 12

In the School

Child Behavior

The average teacher posttest scores on the RBPC showed a statistically significant 12 percent decrease in the total child behavior problem score (Table 5). The teachers reported statistically significant decreases on three of the relevant subscales: an 11 percent decrease in the attention problems score, a 21 percent decrease in the anxiety/withdrawal score, and a 17 percent decrease in the motor excess score (Figure 7). The 5 percent reduction in the conduct disorder score was not statistically significant.

TABLE 4:
Isolation Subscale of the Parenting Stress Index
Graduates with Pretest Scores Above the Mean
N = 87

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Isolation:	17.66	2.48	16.59**	3.52

** Paired t-test: statistically significant at $p \leq .01$
Normal range (20th-80th, 50th percentile) 10 - 16, 12

The teachers of 203 children provided child behavior data. They reported that 119 (59 percent) of the children showed a decrease in their total behavior problem scores and 13 (6 percent) showed no change. Forty-one percent showed decreases in their conduct disorder scores; 56 percent showed decreases in their attention problems score; 54 percent showed decreases in their anxiety/withdrawal scores; and 41 percent showed decreases in their motor excess scores. About 14 percent (29) of the children were reported to show post-program decreases on each of the four relevant subscales.

School records also indicate reductions in FAST children's behavior problems. In 1997, principals at two Calgary schools collected data on program participants' referrals to the office. The sample consisted of 23 FAST children, both "identified" children and their siblings. During the two weeks before their FAST cycles, these children were referred to the office a total of 153 times. During the two weeks after FAST, they were referred only 20 times. This was an 87 percent decrease in referrals to the office for these children.

TABLE 5:
TEACHER Average Scores on the
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1986)
N = 203

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
TOTAL SCORE:	33.43	22.61	29.47***	24.73
Subscales:				
Conduct Disorder:	9.53	10.28	9.03	10.66
Attention Problems:	11.64	7.92	10.33***	8.34
Anxiety/Withdrawal:	6.72	5.07	5.34***	4.78
Motor Excess:	3.09	2.66	2.58***	2.62

*** Paired t-tests: statistically significant at $p \leq .001$

Parent-School Contact

The parents' average post-program scores showed statistically significant increases in contact to the school about their child's academic performance, doing volunteer work for the school, and helping in the classroom (Table 6). The scores also showed statistically significant increases in contact from the school concerning their child's academic performance and doing volunteer work for the school. Pretest-posttest comparisons revealed increases in the number of parents attending parent-teacher conferences and belonging to school-related organizations other than PTO/PTA. The parents also reported a statistically significant increase in the number of times per week that they participated in sports activities with their child. For most of the remaining questions, parents reported small changes that were not statistically significant.

FIGURE 7:
Revised Behavior Problem Checklist
TEACHER Results for Children, with Comparisons
to the Clinical and Normal Populations (6-12 Years)

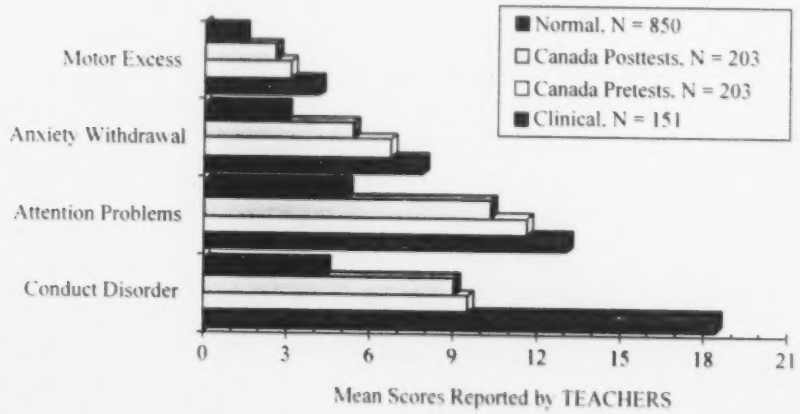


TABLE 6:
Parental Involvement in School and School-Related Activities
(N = 189)

A. Frequency with Which Parents Contacted School
Question: This year, how many times did you (or someone in your household) contact the school about each of the following?

Scale: 1 = zero (0) 2 = one to two times 3 = three to four times 4 = five or more times

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Child's academic performance	2.2	1.0	2.5***	1.0
Class your child took	1.6	.8	1.7	.9
Volunteer work for school	1.5	.9	1.6**	1.0
Participate in fund raising	1.4	.7	1.4	.7
Provide information for records	1.8	.8	1.8	.8
Child's behavior	2.3	1.1	2.4	1.2
Help in classroom	1.4	.9	1.5*	.9

B. Frequency with Which School Contacted Parents
Question: This year, how many times, not counting report cards, did someone at the school contact you about each of the following?

Scale: 1 = zero (0) 2 = one to two times 3 = three to four times 4 = five or more times

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Child's academic performance	1.7	.9	1.9*	1.0
Child's behavior	2.0	1.1	2.0	1.2
Volunteer work for the school	1.4	.8	1.5*	.8
Participate in fund raising	1.3	.7	1.4	.7

C. Parental Involvement in School Organizations
Question: Did you or your spouse/partner do any of the following at your child's school last year?

	Percentage answering YES	
	Pretest	Posttest
Attend parent-teacher conference	77%	84%*
Belong to a parent-teacher organization	15%	19%
Attend meetings of parent-teacher organization	30%	32%
Take part in activities of parent-teacher org.	30%	37%
Belong to other org. dealing with school matters	15%	30%***

Table 6 continued on next page

D. Parental Participation in School-Related Activities with Child
Question: How many times in a normal week would some household member participate in the following activities with your child?

Scale: 1 = zero (0) 2 = one to two times 3 = three to four times 4 = five or more times

	Pretest		*Posttest*	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Read with or to your child	3.2	.9	3.2	.8
Work on arithmetic or math	2.6	1.0	2.7	1.0
Work on penmanship or writing	2.5	1.0	2.5	1.0
Watch educational programs on T.V.	2.5	1.0	2.6	1.0
Participate together in sports activities	2.1	1.0	2.3*	.9

*** Paired t-tests: statistically significant at $p \leq .001$
** Paired t-tests: statistically significant at $p \leq .01$
* Paired t-tests: statistically significant at $p \leq .05$

FAST provides an avenue for parent involvement at school. Families attend sessions for two and one-half hours per week. Plus, for one week each family spends about four hours cooking a meal for the other families. This provides the potential for 24 hours of involvement per family. FAST Canada graduates attended an average of 7.4 sessions. Thus, the average number of parent involvement hours for FAST would be 22.5 hours per family.

Parent-Staff Relationship

Parents' responses to the Program Evaluation by Family reflect improvements in their relationship with the school. Statements below represent responses to two questions: "How has FAST affected your relationship with School Personnel?" "How has FAST or its staff helped you?"

- "I feel much more comfortable at school."
- "Teachers and parents get a better understanding of each other."
- "Finally, I had a chance to see how much school personnel care and how much they like to be with our children.
- "I feel I can go to them if I need help."
- "Made me feel comfortable stopping to talk to them about a concern or just saying hello."

In the Community

Participation and Graduation

The families of at least 212 children graduated from these 27 FAST program cycles. The graduating families attended an average of 7.4 of the eight weekly meetings. More than 60 percent of the graduating families attended each one of the eight meetings. Almost 94 percent percent of the families who attended one FAST session continued and graduated. Eighteen of the 27 (67 percent) FAST cycles had a 100 percent graduation rate. On average, 19 children and 11 adults attended at least one meeting of each FAST cycle. A total of more than 500 children and 300 adults participated in these program cycles.

Participant Satisfaction

Upon completing the program, 173 parents rated FAST on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 being "worst" and 10 being "best." The average score for these 173 parents was 8.84. About 39 percent of the parents rated the program a 10, 25 percent rated it a nine, and 22 percent rated it an eight.

Group averages were also calculated for each of the 27 cycles. The median of these average satisfaction scores was 8.83. Thirteen (48%) of the groups gave the program an average satisfaction rating of 9.00 or higher.

Parents' responses to the Program Evaluation by Family reflect their satisfaction with the program. Statements below represent responses to three questions: "What did you and your family enjoy the most about FAST?" "Please ask your children for their comments." "Please feel free to add any additional comments or questions you may have."

- "Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the FAST program. We found it very rewarding."
- "We enjoyed every aspect of the FAST program, but both my oldest daughter and I really enjoyed the one-on-one time we had."
- "I enjoyed the structure and the friendly support and the quality time I was able to spend with my child at playtime."
- "My children enjoyed playtime, the food, Scribbles, the Feeling Charades, and the lottery."
- "My children looked forward to FAST every Wednesday and were always asking how many sleeps until FAST!"

Community Resources

FAST is collaborative program involving partnerships among parents, schools, and community agencies. Twenty-six (26) community agencies partnered with these 15 schools to complete FAST cycles. These community agencies included 13 family service agencies and 13 substance abuse agencies.

Parents made connections with these agencies and with other parents. Parents' responses to the Program Evaluation by Family reflect growth in their support networks. Statements below represent responses to two questions: "How has FAST or its staff helped you?" "How has FAST affected your relationship with the Parent Group?"

- "It was really nice to meet other parents in the community and form a common interest with them."
- "It made me feel part of the community. It allowed the chance to meet other families and to know what is happening in our community."
- "A network of community, professional and school assistance."
- "Has given me awareness of other community programs out there; given me a sense of security, knowing that there are others I can talk to or lean on in times of need."
- "The FAST team showed me that if there are any problems I could find help."

Summary of Results

Aggregate evaluation results indicate that these 27 Families and Schools Together (FAST) program cycles in Canada have successfully achieved the immediate outcomes associated with the FAST program. Parents and teachers reported statistically significant decreases in the child behavior problems. According to parents' reports, families showed increases in cohesion and maintained adaptability scores in the normal range. In general, parents' experiences of social isolation remained in the normal range; on average, parents who began the program with high social isolation scores reported significant decreases. Parents reported increases in many aspects of their involvement with their child's school. Qualitative responses on the Program Evaluation by Family indicated that families' program experiences were consistent with the program's goals.

AFTERWORD

The Canadian National Centre for Families and Schools Together is a result of a partnership between Family Service Canada and the Alliance for Children and Families. The purpose of the National Centre is to:

- provide ongoing consultation and information to FAST Programs
- coordinate training of FAST teams throughout Canada
- monitor program progress in Canadian sites
- monitor and support the implementation and use of the evaluation component
- organize networking opportunities for Canadian programs
- sponsor Training of Trainer programs within Canada
- maintain a liaison with the Alliance for Children and Families for program developments and quality assurance.

We would welcome your comments or inquiries. Please call 1-877-205-5203 for further information.

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ENDNOTES

[1] In early 1999, new FAST cycles began in the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan.

[2] Some families graduated from the program with two "identified" children (children doing Special Play). Thus, there was a higher number of graduating children than graduating families.

[3] Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100 percent.

[4] These normal and clinical means were extrapolated from Quay and Peterson (1987, p. 27). The scores are based on ratings by parents, teachers, and other professionals. The mean score for normal children between the ages of six and 12 is 16.92. The mean score for clinical children between the ages of six and 12 is 46.76.

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